

Monday 12/28/20

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Lori Loughlin Released From Prison After Serving 2 Months for Role in College Admissions Scandal
by [Mary F.](#)

Lori Loughlin is an American actress and producer best known for her role as Rebecca Donaldson-Katsopolis on the ABC sitcom "Full House." Loughlin and her husband Mossimo Giannulli in 2020 pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit fraud in relation to a college admissions bribery scandal.

Loughlin was [released from the Federal Correctional Institution](#) in Dublin, California, on Monday after serving two months behind bars for her role in a US college admissions scandal, which was busted in 2019 by an FBI investigation code-named Operation Varsity Blues.

According to a source who spoke to [People](#), the actress had a tearful reunion with her daughters Olivia Jade Giannulli, 20, and Isabella Rose Giannulli, 21.

"It's the end of a very long ordeal," the source told the outlet.

Another insider said that Loughlin, 56, "seems beyond relieved that she can put her prison sentence behind her."

"It's the most stressful thing she has ever dealt with. She plans on spending New Year's with Olivia and Bella".

The "Full House" alum was given a two-month prison term in August after she and her husband pleaded guilty to paying the scheme's mastermind, William "Rick" Singer, \$500,000 to get her two daughters recruited onto the University of Southern California's rowing team, despite their having no experience with the sport.

Loughlin began serving her sentence on October 30. Her fashion designer husband, who also pleaded guilty to a conspiracy charge as part of a plea deal, began serving his five-month sentence at the Federal Correctional Complex in Lompoc, California, on November 19. While Loughlin admitted to one count of conspiracy to commit wire and mail fraud, her husband pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit wire and mail fraud and one count of honest services wire and mail fraud.

The actress will still be required to serve two years of supervised release and conduct 100 hours of community service.

Fifty-three people [have been charged](#) as part of the college admissions conspiracy. Collectively, they are accused of paying [more than \\$25 million](#) to Singer between 2011 and 2018 to fraudulently alter exam test scores and bribe college officials into accepting their children into prestigious schools.

Other famous people involved in the scheme include actress Felicity Huffman, who pleaded guilty to conspiracy for paying \$15,000 to Singer to change her daughter's SAT scores.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Huffman spent 11 days in prison in October 2019.

Novavax Launches Phase 3 Trial of Its COVID-19 Vaccine in US

by [Mary F.](#)

To date, two COVID-19 vaccines have been approved in the US: one developed by Pfizer and BioNTech, and another made by Moderna. Both of these vaccines use messenger RNA (mRNA) to teach cells how to make a protein that triggers an immune response to COVID-19. American company Novavax on Monday announced that it has launched a phase 3 trial of its COVID-19 vaccine, making it the fifth company to start a late-stage vaccine trial in the US. According to a [news release from the US National Institutes of Health](#) (NIH), the randomized, placebo-controlled trial will enroll around 30,000 people at around 115 sites in the US and Mexico.

The trial, which is being partly funded by the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), will determine the safety and efficacy of NVX-CoV2373, the vaccine candidate developed by Novavax.

“Addressing the unprecedented health crisis of COVID-19 has required extraordinary efforts on the part of government, academia, industry and the community,” said NIAID Director Anthony Fauci in the news release. “The launch of this study — the fifth investigational COVID-19 vaccine candidate to be tested in a phase 3 trial in the United States — demonstrates our resolve to end the pandemic through development of multiple safe and effective vaccines.”

“We’ve come this far, this fast, but we need to get to the finish line,” added Francis S. Collins, director of the NIH, of which the NIAID is part. “That will require multiple vaccines using different approaches to ensure everyone is protected safely and effectively from this deadly disease.” Study volunteers will receive two injections of the vaccine, with the second shot administered 21 days after the first.

Novavax’s vaccine is made from a stabilized form of the spike protein of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, using the company’s recombinant protein nanoparticle technology. The spike protein allows the virus to penetrate host cells and cause infection. Recombinant proteins are proteins containing genetic material from multiple sources.

In previous [trials](#) on animals, injection of NVX-CoV2373 generated antibodies that blocked the COVID-19 spike protein from binding to the cell surface receptors the virus targeted.

In November, the UK [became the first country in the world](#) to spearhead a phase 3 trial for the Novavax vaccine candidate.

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) authorized emergency use of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines earlier this month.

Vaccine makers AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson are also [expected to release safety and efficacy data](#) from late-stage trials as early as January.

Early data released in November showed that the AstraZeneca vaccine was only 62% effective compared to those of Pfizer and Moderna, which have 95% and 94% efficacy, respectively.

This weekend, AstraZeneca CEO Pascal Soriot told [The Sunday Times](#) that he thinks the COVID-19 vaccine his company is developing could eventually be 95% effective at preventing infection.

"We think we have figured out the winning formula and how to get efficacy that, after two doses, is up there with everybody else," Soriot said.

Early results have indicated that a single dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine led to COVID-19 antibodies being detected in [97% of participants](#). Additional data on the vaccine's effectiveness in a clinical setting is expected in early 2021.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

One Year After First COVID-19 Report, Wuhan Doctor Who Filed Discovery Rejects 'Cover-Up' Narrative

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

While the US government and mainstream media have attempted to rewrite the history of the opening stages of the COVID-19 pandemic to pin the blame for the outbreak on China, one of the central figures of that period has reaffirmed the speed and accuracy of the medical response in Wuhan.

On Sunday, China commemorated the first anniversary of the first reporting of COVID-19 by Zhang Jixian, director of respiratory medicine at the Hubei Provincial Hospital of Integrated Chinese and Western Medicine. In an interview with Chinese media, Zhang rejected the narrative of a government coverup in the outbreak's early stages forwarded by the US state and mainstream media

"After I first reported the outbreak situation, we started to regularly report the epidemic information to the world beginning from January 3, 2020," [she said, according to the South China Morning Post](#), noting it "certainly did not conceal the relevant data on the epidemic."

"The facts are so clear, how can it be called a cover-up?"

On December 27, 2019, Zhang became the first to piece together that several of the hospital's patients were suffering the same set of unusual symptoms: a cough, fever and infected lungs that appeared pneumonia-like. While they came from two different families, [Zhang quickly pieced together their connection](#) via the Huanan Wet Market, which sells a variety of live and frozen animals, and forwarded the report to Jiangnan district Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

This provided the basis for identifying more cases that rolled into the medical center in the coming days. On January 1, the wet market was closed, and on January 3, [Chinese authorities shared their information with the World Health Organization](#) (WHO), the European Union and the governments of Japan, South Korea, the US and UK, among other nations.

By January 12, Chinese researchers had sequenced the genome of the virus and confirmed it was different from SARS-CoV-1, the virus that causes severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), a disease that infected over 8,000 people and killed 774 between 2002 and 2004. The

new virus was provisionally named 2019-nCoV until the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses gave it the official name SARS-CoV-2 in early February.

Indeed, during the first weeks after the emergence of this “pneumonia of unknown origin,” China’s quick response was hailed around the globe, including in the United States, where US President Donald Trump changed his tune and began alleging a coverup once his own government failed to contain cases of COVID-19 that arrived in the US.

“China has been working very hard to contain the Coronavirus,” Trump tweeted on January 24, 2020. “The United States greatly appreciates their efforts and transparency. It will all work out well. In particular, on behalf of the American People, I want to thank President Xi [Jinping]!” Indeed, by early February, [the US media had picked up on a supposed “whistleblower” case](#), that of Wuhan doctor Li Wenliang, who faced reprimand at work after sending incorrect and alarming messages to school colleagues. [The ophthalmologist, who had no role in treating](#) the few dozen COVID-19 cases in Wuhan in late December, told colleagues the as-yet unidentified virus was SARS and shared photos of a private medical record.

At the time, Li’s claims were unfounded, and he was reprimanded but neither fired nor arrested, as western media has since claimed. He did not “warn about the coronavirus outbreak,” as the New York Times claimed, as his messages were sent on December 30 - three days after Zhang alerted the local CDC. Li died of COVID-19 in early February.

[A late eulogy of the doctor in Politico on Saturday](#) shows the extent to which US media has reimagined China’s response, claiming Li’s actions and subsequent death caused a sea-change in how the Chinese government reported the virus, including causing Beijing to issue daily reports on COVID-19 cases and deaths. However, China began making daily reports on those issues on January 11, before human-to-human transmission was proven and before SARS-CoV-2 was positively identified as a unique pathogen.

By April, as COVID-19 cases and deaths skyrocketed in the United States, Trump had [accused the WHO of “mismanaging the crisis”](#) and of being controlled by Beijing, which he said manipulated its data reports to conceal the extent of the outbreak. Trump subsequently announced the US was pulling out of the WHO by the summer of 2021, although incoming US President-elect Joe Biden has promised to reverse the move.

[In early January 2021, an international team from the WHO](#) will venture to Wuhan in an effort to track down the origins of the virus and if it came from animals, how it made the leap into humans.

SARS was proven in 2017 to have originally been a disease that infected a species of horseshoe bat, and similar suspicions arose in early 2020 about bats being the origin of COVID-19 as well. However, a more recent hypothesis the WHO hopes to test is that the virus arrived in frozen food shipments from elsewhere.

“The epidemic in Wuhan possibly also has a lot to do with the cold chain,” [Zhang told the Global Times on Sunday](#). “Now looking back at the Wuhan epidemic, most of the people among the original patients were employees, merchants or consumers at the Huanan seafood market, as well as those living around it. So I think the epidemic must have a lot to do with the cold chain.” Wu Zunyou, the chief epidemiologist of the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, [told the state outlet last week that subsequent](#) outbreaks of COVID-19 in Beijing, Dalian and Qingdao were also connected to frozen seafood markets, further suggesting a connection.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Photos: China's Third Amphibious Assault Ship Nears Completion as First Docks With Shandong Carrier
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

China's new class of amphibious assault ship - part helicopter carrier, part marine landing dock - is growing quickly. While the first Type 075 ship is finishing up sea trials alongside its bigger comrade, the aircraft carrier Shandong, the third one is coming together in a Shanghai shipyard. New photos from the Hudong-Zhonghua shipyard in Shanghai that emerged online show China's third Type 075 landing helicopter dock (LHD) is taking shape. Although the steel hull remains exposed, the flight deck appears mostly complete, and the island superstructure is installed on the ship's starboard side.

However, the photos only show the warship from the bow end, leaving no hint of the progress made in building the rear well dock, from which marines in amphibious landing craft would disembark to assault an enemy beachhead. Construction only began earlier this year, but the Type 075s have been assembled at a breakneck pace. By comparison, the US Navy's USS Tripoli amphibious assault ship, launched in 2017 and roughly the same size as the Type 075, [took nearly three years to construct, according to Forbes](#).

Meanwhile, the first Type 075 has been spotted anchored [alongside the carrier Shandong at the Yulin Naval Base](#) in southern Hainan. First launched in September 2019, the warship is going through the final stages of its sea trials, after which it will be christened with a name and join the fleet in the South China Sea.

The two warships were also spotted by satellite:

The conjunction is perhaps the first known meeting of China's two classes of aircraft carrier. Although smaller than the Shandong and incapable of carrying the fixed-wing aircraft it sports, the Type 075 can carry some 30 helicopters and is larger than the aircraft carriers of many nations, including Italy, Spain, Japan and Thailand.

Last week, [the second Type 075 performed its first sea trial](#), briefly venturing out into the East China Sea from the Shanghai shipyard where the third LHD is being built.

Extensive fleet expansion for the People's Liberation Army Navy is included in the recently drafted 14th Five-Year Plan presented last month. By 2025, Beijing aims to have begun construction on five more Type 075 LHDs, and development of [the Type 076 "assault carrier," which was reported on](#) earlier this year, hopes [to be in full swing, according to The Diplomat](#). However, the outlet notes the economic proposal conspicuously omits estimates on aircraft carrier construction. These capital ships are, of course, accompanied by a slew of new smaller warships, [including the huge Type 055 missile cruiser](#).

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Air Force Hands Out \$1.2 Million in 'Quantum Information Science' Research Grants
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Futuristic-sounding quantum technologies have raised the eyebrows of US lawmakers, but Pentagon advocates have argued that research into basic technologies such as quantum clocks and sensors will reap huge long-term benefits.

[The US Air Force Research Laboratory \(AFRL\) announced Monday](#) its Office of Scientific Research had awarded 17 grants of roughly \$75,000 each to support research on "quantum information science" at institutions around the globe. The one-year grants followed a three-day virtual pitch event in September that received three dozen entries.

Prior to the event, Information Directorate Deputy Director Dr. Michael Hayduk, who oversees quantum research at the AFRL, [said in a news release that the Air Force is](#) "committed to building a quantum information science alliance of principal investigators across academia, industry, and the government to accelerate advancements in this emerging field."

[The AFRL website explains that quantum information science](#) "applies the best understanding of the sub-atomic world - quantum theory - to generate new knowledge and technologies." In other words, the researchers aim to apply some of the unique properties of subatomic particles, such as quantum entanglement and superposition, to gather and process information in support of US military objectives.

[According to C4ISRNET, the winning submissions](#) included the application of quantum technologies to sensors for navigation in GPS-denial situations, an optical atomic clock and quantum computing solutions.

With so much of the US military's everyday functioning flowing through its vast network of communications and intelligence satellites, the Pentagon has been looking for ways to ensure its ability to continue functioning if those assets come under attack. The ostensible fear of an [attack by enemy satellites or ground-based anti-satellite](#) weapons has prompted creation of the US Space Force (USSF). Also part of the Department of the Air Force, the USSF has spearheaded the [development of anti-jamming technology](#) as well as [offensive jamming capabilities](#).

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

'Major Weakness': Lack of Consistent Pandemic Strategies to Blame for US' COVID-19 Spikes -
Fauci
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

The latest figures by Johns Hopkins University (JHU) indicate that more than 19.1 million COVID-19 cases have been documented in the US since the onset of the pandemic. As of Monday, over 150,000 new cases were recorded nationwide, as the viral outbreak continues to spread in the hard-hit US state of California.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director of the US' National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, stated during a Monday interview that surging COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths were largely due to the US' "federalist approach" to handling the respiratory illness.

The top health expert, who also happens to serve as a member of the White House coronavirus task force, [explained during a BBC Radio 4 interview](#) that a lack of a consistent strategy to tackle the virus was a "major weakness" in combating the pandemic.

"The fundamental tenet of our government is the federalist approach, where you have the United States of America, which is 50 states and essential government," Fauci said. "But the states are very often given a considerable amount of leeway in doing things the way they want to do it, as opposed to in response to federal mandates, which are relatively rarely given." However, Fauci acknowledged that while the "federalist approach" works "for certain things," it's not exactly ideal when you're trying to get a handle on a pandemic. The health official underscored that a virus "doesn't know the difference between the border of New York and New Jersey, or Florida and Georgia, or Texas and Oklahoma."

"What we've had was a considerable disparity with states doing things differently in a non-consistent way," Fauci noted. "There have been a lot of factors that have led to the fact that, unfortunately for us, the United States has been the hardest hit country in the world, but I believe that disparity among how states do things has been a major weakness in our response." Although US President Donald Trump [did release a set of guidelines for states to follow](#), the commander-in-chief left the burden on states to decide how to deal with the pandemic's effects while he promised to provide needed supplies.

Fauci further stated that political polarization was also to blame for the varying COVID-19 countermeasures by US states. Early on in the pandemic, both masking and social distancing guidelines were turned into a political showdown, with many Americans arguing that their rights were being attacked.

And yet, despite opposing beliefs to the guidelines, Fauci stressed that such measures need to be kept in place until both of the currently approved COVID-19 vaccines are made widely available to the public. "Until we get that veil of protection, then we are constantly going to be challenged," he said.

With a [positivity ratio of just over 10%](#), the US remains the country with the highest COVID-19 case tally. At present, the US states being impacted the hardest in terms of new cases are [California](#) and [Tennessee](#), both now considered epicenters for the disease.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom is expected to extend stay-at-home orders on Monday for his state's southern regions, where health professionals and hospitals are struggling to meet surging COVID-19 demands. Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee [recently announced new restrictions](#) to curb the disease's spread that included 10-person limits for indoor, public events.

The latest forecast from the [US' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) suggests the American death toll may increase by nearly 28,000 by the week ending January 16, 2021, and that the tally could reach as high as 419,000. [According to JHU's count](#), the current death toll has surpassed 333,800.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

New York Clinic Under Investigation by Attorney General Over Alleged COVID-19 Vaccine Fraud

by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Over the weekend, alarms were set off after New York State's top doctor said that a health facility may have obtained doses of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine and begun distributing doses to the general public, deviating from the state's plan to inoculate frontline health professionals and nursing home staff and residents first.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo revealed Monday that the office of the state's attorney general will be investigating whether a health care clinic operating within the Empire State fraudulently obtained and distributed doses of a COVID-19 vaccine to the general public.

Although Cuomo did not offer details of the investigation, he did [indicate during a COVID-19 briefing](#) that the allegations involved the ParCare Community Health Network, which serves as a health provider in the state's Orange County. Facilities can also be found in New York City's Manhattan and Brooklyn boroughs.

"[Reports emerged over the weekend of] possible fraud by a health care provider, and you're going to see more and more of this - the vaccine is a valuable commodity," Cuomo acknowledged. "You'll have fraud in the vaccine process; it's an almost inevitable function of human nature and of the marketplace."

"Vaccines are valuable, and there will be people who break the law," Cuomo stressed. He added that based on how the vaccines the facility received were transferred, stored and administered, "there are multiple crimes that could be charged."

The governor went on to note that an investigation had been recently launched by the New York State Police, but that the probe would be referred to the New York attorney general for further investigation. "[Attorney General Letitia James] will take it on and make it a priority," Cuomo said.

Additionally, the Democratic governor explained that he would be signing an executive order to make clear there would be severe consequences for individuals and facilities who attempt to commit fraud with regards to the vaccines. The order will enact a fine of up to \$1 million and may revoke medical licenses for practices within the state that violate COVID-19 vaccine standards set by the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH).

"We are very serious about this," he said. "We will find out, and it's not worth risking your license, as well as a possible civil and criminal penalty."

At present, New York State is only allowing for the COVID-19 vaccines to be administered to health care workers and nursing home residents and staffers; however, the state is expected to expand its program this week to urgent care employees and residents of addiction facilities. To date, roughly 140,000 New Yorkers have received the first shot of the two-part vaccines. Cuomo stated that an additional 139,400 Pfizer vaccines and 119,600 doses of the Moderna vaccine would be made available this week.

The ParCare Community Health Network came under the public microscope over the weekend after New York State Health Commissioner Dr. Howard Zucker [released a statement](#) disclosing that the company "may have fraudulently obtained COVID-19 vaccine, transferred it to facilities

in other parts of the state in violation of state guidelines and diverted it to members of the public.”

Notably, the NYSDOH had been rationing vaccine doses due to its momentarily short supplies. Citing a company spokesperson, [the New York Post reported](#) ParCare had administered 869 of the 2,300 Moderna doses it had received following an order placed with the NYSDOH, and has since “proactively returned” its remaining doses amid the criminal probe.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US House Passes Measure to Increase Second Round of Stimulus Checks to \$2,000
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

The US House of Representatives took up efforts to increase the amount offered in the second round of stimulus checks to \$2,000 after US President Donald Trump referred to the approved \$600 direct payments as “ridiculously low.”

The House voted on Monday to approve a new measure that would significantly increase the dollar amount of federal direct payments the US government previously approved for Americans struggling to make ends meet amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The measure cleared the chamber by a [vote of 275 to 134](#). A total of 231 Democrats and 44 Republicans voted in favor of the legislation.

The congressional vote, which comes one day after Trump signed the \$2.3 trillion pandemic relief package and full-year government spending bill into law, would boost federal stimulus checks from \$600 to \$2,000.

Ahead of the vote, US Rep. Kevin Brady (R-TX) [remarked on the House floor](#) that funding increase was “hastily dropped on us at the last minute.” He added that he was concerned “this whopping \$463 billion won’t do what’s needed, stimulate the economy or help workers get back to work.”

A senior official with the US Department of the Treasury [informed CNBC](#) that should both chambers approve the \$2,000 checks, the financial agency will simply add on the \$1,400 difference. The \$600 direct payments are expected to start rolling out to Americans who fit the bill in the coming weeks.

However, now that the measure heads to the US Senate, its fate is uncertain, as the Republican-held chamber opposed measures earlier this month to pass legislation allowing for \$1,200 stimulus checks. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) has yet to signal whether he will bring the vote to the floor.

Under the second round of stimulus checks, [Americans eligible for the \\$600 payments](#) will include individuals who reported an adjusted gross income of \$75,000 or less on their 2019 tax returns, couples who filed jointly and made \$150,000 or less, and heads of households who made \$112,500 or less.

A strong push for \$2,000 stimulus check came last week after Trump referred to the COVID-19 relief aid passed by the US Congress as a “disgrace” because it provided little funding to Americans, but offered hefty foreign aid.

"It's called the COVID relief bill, but it has almost nothing to do with COVID," Trump [said in a video shared online](#). "Congress found plenty of money for foreign countries, lobbyists and special interests while sending the bare minimum to the American people."

Trump's call were quickly picked up and hailed by Democrats, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), [who remarked on Twitter](#) that "Democrats are ready to bring this to the floor this week by unanimous consent." US President-elect Joe Biden has also indicated that he supports \$2,000 payments to Americans.

The first round of stimulus checks from the US government was released months ago and amounted to \$1,200 each. The first aid package also included increased unemployment benefits.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Massive Outage Across Mexico Leaves Millions Without Power Amid Pandemic
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

One of the last major power outages to occur in Mexico unfolded in April 2019, when a partial blackout left 1.6 million users without electricity in three Mexican states - including in the tourist-rich city of Cancún.

Millions of residents across multiple Mexican states were left without power Monday after the country experienced several setbacks on its power grid, the independent operator National Center for Energy Control (CENACE) revealed on social media.

The nearly two-hour-long power outage began at 2:29 p.m. local time and saw some 10.3 millions users immediately lose their electricity. [According to reports](#), power outages were reported in Mexico City and multiple Mexican states such as Hidalgo, Jalisco, Sinaloa, Quintana Roo, Oaxaca, Chiapas and Michoacán, among others.

[CENACE reported via social media](#) that the massive daytime blackout was caused by an "imbalance in the National Interconnected System between load and power generation."

Additionally, the operator noted that the network lost 7,500 megawatts of electricity.

With assistance from Mexico's Federal Electricity Commission (CFE), CERACE was able to fully restore power to affected users by 4:12 p.m. local time.

In a [separate statement](#), CFE further explained the network triggered an outage across much of the Spanish-speaking country as part of a system response that prevents "low frequency" occurrences from knocking out power for all of its customers.

[Outlet Medio Tiempo also reported](#) that telecommunication companies Telcel, Telmex, Izzi, AT&T and Movistar were experiencing connection issues during the outage.

It's presently unclear what prompted the power "imbalance."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Labor Dept., States Scramble to Avoid Delay in COVID-19 Unemployment Benefits
by [Evan Craighead](#)

While the \$900 billion COVID-19 relief bill signed into law by US President Donald Trump on Sunday provides extra unemployment benefits, many states will have to wait until January to begin disbursing those funds.

Trump's nearly weeklong delay in signing the bill approved by Congress on December 21 could result in delayed unemployment assistance for millions of Americans across the country, Michele Evermore, a volunteer member of US President-elect Joe Biden's transition review team for the US Department of Labor, [explained to The Hill on Monday](#).

Pandemic Unemployment Assistance and Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation - [two emergency unemployment programs](#) supporting some 14 million Americans - expired on Saturday, but were restarted following Sunday's signing of the relief bill and are set to last until March.

Under the new relief legislation, recipients will be provided an additional \$300 in weekly benefits during the same period.

Due to the legal language of the measure, Evermore believes the Labor Department's Employment and Training Administration, which handles the transfer of federal funds to states, could possibly elect to modify its state agreements, preventing the gap in assistance.

"It looks like it may be possible that states could, instead of drafting new agreements with states, they could just modify their old agreements," she noted.

The proposed loophole could encounter some legal pushback.

According to The Hill, one state unemployment office has confirmed that it is trying to use the legal workaround. However, the same cannot be said for all state governments.

"Unfortunately, by delaying the signing of the bill and letting these programs lapse, President Trump likely increased the delay these workers will experience in getting their [unemployment] benefit payments," Elizabeth Pancotti, a policy advisor at the think tank Employ America, [told CNBC](#).

According to Pancotti, some states may take five to seven weeks to issue their unemployment funds.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Health Officials Discard 50 Vials of Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine Over 'Human Error'

© REUTERS / David Himbert

by [Evan Craighead](#)

According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a single vial of Moderna's COVID-19 novel coronavirus vaccine contains 10 doses. The vaccine received emergency use authorization in the US shortly after the rollout of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.

Health officials with Advocate Aurora Health from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, announced Monday that dozens of Moderna COVID-19 vaccine vials were taken and accidentally left out of a freezer over the weekend.

"We learned that about 50 vials of Moderna vaccine were inadvertently removed from a pharmacy refrigerator overnight," an Advocate Aurora Health spokesperson [told local outlet TMJ4 Milwaukee](#).

A total of 50 full vials would account for 500 first-round doses of the vaccine.

Health officials noted, however, that some doses were properly administered to individuals prior to refrigeration and removal in question.

"While some of the vaccine was administered to team members on Dec. 26 within the approved 12-hour post-refrigeration window, unfortunately, most of it had to be discarded due to the temperature storage requirements necessary to maintain its viability," the spokesperson said.

"We are clearly disappointed and regret this happened."

[The CDC website details](#) that the Moderna vaccine "may be stored in a freezer between -25°C and -15°C (-13°F and 5°F)." The [Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine can be stored](#) "in an ultra-cold freezer between -80°C and -60°C (-112°F and -76°F)."

"The vaccination program at Aurora Grafton continues uninterrupted because we were able to redirect vaccine supply from other Aurora sites, and we expect additional shipments in the near future," another spokesperson for the company [told The Hill](#), noting that there were no Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines available at their hospital.

The US Food and Drug Administration approved the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines for emergency use in individuals 18 years or older on [December 11](#) and [December 18](#), respectively.

Both Friday approvals for the vaccine were followed by a Monday rollout of the first doses of the two-round vaccination.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Defense Chief Says Pentagon Being Fully Cooperative With Biden Transition Team

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) - Acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller in a statement pushed back against President-elect Joe Biden's criticism that the Department of Defense is not being fully cooperative with the transition process.

"The Department of Defense has conducted 164 interviews with over 400 officials, and provided over 5,000 pages of documents - far more than initially requested by Biden's transition team," Miller said in the statement on Monday.

Miller said defense officials have three interviews scheduled with Biden's transition team this week, two related to the novel coronavirus and one on cybersecurity. Miller added that other interviews are being scheduled for early January.

Earlier on Monday, Biden accused the Trump administration of withholding key national security information, adding that his transition team has faced the most obstruction of the transition process from the Defense Department.

Biden specifically mentioned the Office of Management and Budget as another example of a governmental department where his team was facing roadblocks.

Although the Trump administration has authorized the transition to Biden's administration, the incumbent President Donald Trump refuses to concede and disputes the validity of the election result, accusing the Democrats of engaging in massive fraud and acts of impropriety.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US House Overrides Trump Veto of 2021 Defense Spending Bill, Sends Measure to Senate

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives has voted to override for the first time President Donald Trump's veto of the fiscal year 2021 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

The House voted 322-87 on Monday evening to override Trump's veto of the \$740 billion NDAA, thereby sending the measure to the Republican-majority Senate for consideration.

On Wednesday, Trump vetoed the NDAA because it would not repeal Section 230 that protects tech companies from liability for restricting or censoring third-party content online; negate or slowdown withdrawals of US troops deployed overseas and rename military bases carrying names of Confederate figures.

The NDAA includes provisions for imposing sanctions against the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project and against Turkey for acquiring the Russian S-400 air defense system.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US House Overrides Trump Veto of 2021 Defense Spending Bill, Sends Measure to Senate

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives has voted to override for the first time President Donald Trump's veto of the fiscal year 2021 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

The House voted 322-87 on Monday evening to override Trump's veto of the \$740 billion NDAA, thereby sending the measure to the Republican-majority Senate for consideration.

On Wednesday, Trump vetoed the NDAA because it would not repeal Section 230 that protects tech companies from liability for restricting or censoring third-party content online; negate or slowdown withdrawals of US troops deployed overseas and rename military bases carrying names of Confederate figures.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US House Passes Bill to Provide Americans \$2,000 Stimulus Checks, Sends Measure to Senate

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives has passed legislation to provide Americans with \$2,000 stimulus checks in an effort to offer financial relief during the novel coronavirus pandemic.

The House passed on Monday the Caring for Americans with Supplemental Help Act in a 275-134 vote, sending the measure to the Senate for consideration.

Last week, President Donald Trump threatened to veto the COVID-19 relief and spending package passed by Congress if it did not include changes such as boosting stimulus payments from \$600 to \$2,000 for each US citizen.

However, Trump signed the package on Sunday and the measure passed on Monday would increase the payments from \$600 to \$2,000.

Republicans, which control the Senate, have yet to indicate if they will support the increase in relief payments.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Pelosi Says US House Will Hold Second Vote for \$2,000 Relief Checks if First Vote Fails

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said if the chamber fails to get a two-third majority to pass COVID-19 relief legislation that provides a \$2,000 for each American, a second vote will be held to approve the bill via a simple majority.

"We will pass this bill today, either under suspension or under a rule where it just requires a majority vote," Pelosi said during remarks on the floor of the House of Representatives on Monday.

Pelosi said she hopes Democrats will be able to get strong bipartisan support for the new COVID-19 relief bill.

The United States since late January has reported more than 19.2 coronavirus cases and more than 334,000 virus-related deaths, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Over 2.1Mn People in US Have Received First Dose of Coronavirus Vaccine - Health Agency

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) - More than two million individuals in the United States have received the first of two coronavirus vaccine shots, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data revealed.

On Monday, the CDC reported that 2,127,143 individuals in the United States have received the first shot of the coronavirus vaccine.

The CDC data also shows that 11,445,175 doses of the vaccine have been distributed throughout the United States.

The US authorities have reported that more than 19.2 people tested positive for the novel coronavirus and more than 334,000 virus-related deaths, according to the latest data compiled by the Johns Hopkins University.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US to Modernize Defense Priorities Against China, Russia - Biden

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) - The United States need to modernize its defense priorities to meet strategic challenges from China and Russia, including in new realms such as in cyberspace, President-elect Joe Biden said after receiving transition briefings on key security issues.

"We talked about the different strategic challenges we are going to face from both Russia and China and reforms we must make to put ourselves in the strongest possible position to meet those challenges. That includes modernizing our defense priorities to better deter aggression in the future," Biden said during a press conference on Monday.

Biden explained that the United States has to be able to innovate, re-imagine its defenses against growing threats in new realms like cyberspace rather than continue to overinvest in legacy systems designed to address threats of the past.

"We need to close the gap between where our capabilities are now and where they need to be to better deter, detect, disrupt and respond to those sorts of intrusions in the future. This is an area where Republicans and Democrats are in an agreement. We should be able to work on a bipartisan basis to better secure the American people against malign cyber actors," he said. Biden added that the US authorities are still learning about the extent of the recent massive hacking attack on government and private company networks and the vulnerabilities it exposed. Several key officials have attributed the intrusion to Russian-backed hackers, though Moscow has denied any involvement. Addressing the issue during earlier briefings, Biden threatened to retaliate in kind.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik)

NORD STREAM 2

- * The Nord Stream 2 company has completed the pipe-laying work in German waters, the DPA news agency reported on Monday.
- * Any kind of sanctions will have a negative effect on the implementation of commercial projects, but the work on launching the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline needs to be continued, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said.

PUTIN TALKS WITH XI AND NETANYAHU

- * Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping spoke over the telephone and noted the effective efforts by the two countries to combat the coronavirus pandemic, while pointing to the importance of cooperation in the production of vaccines, the Kremlin said on Monday.
- * Putin and Xi expressed readiness to intensify coordination in the international arena to maintain peace and stability, the Kremlin said.
- * Putin and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu discussed over the telephone regional issues with an emphasis on some aspects of development of the situation in Syria, the Kremlin said on Monday.
- * Putin and Netanyahu discussed building up cooperation, including in the context of combating the spread of the coronavirus, the Kremlin said.

NAGORNO-KARABAKH DEVELOPMENTS

- * Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu will discuss establishing a ceasefire center in Nagorno-Karabakh during their meeting in Sochi on December 29, the Russian Foreign Ministry said on Monday.
- * The commander of the Russian peacekeeping contingent in Nagorno -Karabakh, Rustam Muradov, reported that another exchange of prisoners between Armenia and Azerbaijan had taken place.
- * The defense ministry of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR) refuted Baku's claims about an attack on Azeri units in which one soldier was allegedly killed.

GUNFIRE IN GROZNY

- * Three people were killed in an attack in the center of Grozny, the capital of Russia's Chechen Republic, a source familiar with the situation told Sputnik on Monday.
- * Two terrorists with knives, who tried to take away weapons from police officers in Grozny, were eliminated and one policeman was killed, Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov said.

RUSSIAN VESSEL SINKS IN BARENTS SEA

- * Russia's fish trawler Onega that sank in the Barents Sea was fully operational when leaving port, all the necessary procedures were implemented, the All-Russian Association of Fisheries Enterprises, Entrepreneurs and Exporters said on Monday, citing the ship owner.

* Russian President Vladimir Putin conveyed his condolences to the families of those killed and words of support to the survivors of the accident with the Onega fishing ship in the Barents Sea, the Kremlin said.

CORONAVIRUS VACCINES

* The combination of the Sputnik V and AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccines will provide immunity for two years, Alexander Gintsburg, the head of Russia's Gamaleya center said on Monday.

* Russia will start the clinical trials of a new antibodies-based medication against the coronavirus in the fall of 2021, Gintsburg told Sputnik.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Biden Says Trump Administration Obstructs Transition in Key Security Areas

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) - - US President-elect Joe Biden accused on Monday the incumbent administration of withholding national security information and said his team had faced most obstruction of the transition process from the Pentagon.

"From some agencies our team received exemplary cooperation, from the career staff of those agencies, from others - most notably the Department of Defense - we countered obstruction from the political leadership of that department," Biden said during a press briefing.

According to the president-elect, his team is not getting "all the information that we need from the outgoing administration in key national security areas."

"It's nothing short, in my view, of irresponsibility," Biden added.

Biden specifically mentioned the Office of Management and Budget as another example of a governmental department where his team was facing "roadblocks."

Although his administration has authorized the transition to Biden's administration, the incumbent Donald Trump refuses to concede and disputes the validity of the election, accusing his rivals of massive fraud.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Biden Expresses Support for \$2,000 Direct COVID-19 Payments to Americans

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) – US President-elect Joseph Biden said on Monday he supports the direct payment of \$2,000 to all Americans as a part of a COVID-19 relief package.

"Yes," Biden told reporters after his speech, when asked whether he supports the payment.

Last week, US President Donald Trump threatened to veto a COVID-19 relief and spending package passed by Congress if it did not include changes such as boosting stimulus payments

from \$600 to \$2,000 for each citizen. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi expressed support for such a move and urged Trump to call on Republicans in Congress to support it. The US House is set to vote later on Monday on a measure to increase the payments to \$2,000. It remains unclear whether the measure will pass through both chambers of Congress.

Biden Says US Needs Coalition for Confronting China

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) - US President-elect Joe Biden said on Monday that Washington needs to build a coalition of like-minded nations to confront Beijing.

"As we compete with China to hold China's government accountable for its trade abuses, technology, human rights and other fronts, our position would be much stronger when we build coalitions of like-minded partners and allies that make common cause with us in defense of our shared interests and our shared values," Biden said.

Biden said partnering with other democracies on China would "more than double" the US economic leverage over the country.

He added that no global problem could be solved by the US acting alone, including climate change and the coronavirus crisis.

As Biden is set to occupy the White House for at least four years, many experts and officials around the globe have speculated his presidency will represent a sharp break with Trump's foreign policy approach.

This is especially important for Beijing, since under the Trump administration US-China relations have significantly deteriorated, with Washington accusing Beijing of unfair economic practices, human rights violations in some of its regions, encroachment on the special status of Hong Kong, and lack of transparency concerning the coronavirus pandemic.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Troops in Europe Receive First COVID-19 Vaccines Shots - Army

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) - The US Army announced on Monday that it has started vaccinating service members deployed overseas belonging to the European Command against the novel coronavirus.

"US Army Health Clinics in Ansbach, Grafenwoehr and Vilseck [Germany] conducted their first inoculations of healthcare workers with the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine Dec. 28, 2020," the announcement said.

Initial vaccinations are limited to healthcare workers and first responders but will expand to larger groups of servicemen over the next several months, the announcement added.

The United States has authorized two vaccines - from the bio-tech companies Pfizer and Moderna - to conduct an ongoing mass immunization against the coronavirus. Each is administered in two shots with an interval of several weeks required between them.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced last week that more than million Americans have received the first dose of the vaccine.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

'Dozens' of US House Republicans to Object to Electoral College Vote Returns - Lawmaker

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) - Dozens of Republicans in the US House Republicans plan to lodge objections during Congress' certification of the Electoral College results on January 6, in a last bid to overturn the 2020 presidential election, Congressman Mo Brooks said in an interview on Monday.

"There are dozens in the House of Representatives who have reached that conclusion, as I have, we're going to sponsor and co-sponsor objections to the Electoral College vote returns of Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Georgia, Arizona, Nevada, and maybe more depending on where collectively we want to go," Brooks told Fox News, adding that he was unsure whether they have support from the Senate.

The US Congress will meet in a joint session on January 6 to confirm the Electoral College votes, with Vice President Mike Pence presiding over the session to count the votes from each state.

A member of both the House of Representatives and the Senate must file an objection in writing to force a debate and vote to challenge any state's Electoral College results. However, a majority of lawmakers in both the House and Senate would have to vote to uphold the objection. Earlier on Monday, Republican lawmakers filed a lawsuit against Pence to ensure he will determine which electoral votes will be counted when Congress meets to validate the Electoral College votes. The lawsuit seeks to have Pence disregard the official Electoral College votes cast in Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania, and to rely on the "alternate" votes submitted by Republicans in favor of President Donald Trump.

Republican electors in Georgia, Arizona, Nevada, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Michigan held mock electoral votes, casting their ballots for incumbent President Donald Trump as a symbolic gesture to challenge Biden's win in those battleground states. The Republican electors' votes hold no legal weight because they were not certified by any state officials.

The Trump campaign and Republican party have lost more than 50 legal battles in court to try to overturn the presidential election after courts found they had no credible evidence of massive voter fraud, and the latest lawsuit is widely expected to fail.

Biden was confirmed the winner of the November presidential election by the Electoral College on December 14 after all 50 states officially certified the voting results. Trump, however, has refused to concede, alleging voter fraud, despite his campaign losing nearly all of some 60 legal challenges filed within the past month. Biden's inauguration is scheduled for January 20.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Settles With Saudi-Based NCB for Violations of Sanctions on Sudan, Syria - Treasury

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) The United States has reached resolution with Saudi Arabia's National Commercial Bank over its violations of US sanctions against Syria and Sudan, a Treasury Department announced in a release on Monday.

"The US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) today announced a settlement with the National Commercial Bank (NCB), a bank headquartered in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia," the Treasury said.

The Treasury explained that the violations were processed between November 7, 2011 and August 28, 2014 and concern transactions involving Sudan or Syria that transited through American financial system.

"NCB agreed to remit \$653,347 to settle its potential civil liability for 13 apparent violations of the Sudanese Sanctions Regulations, or section 2(b) of Executive Order (E.O.) 13582 of August 17, 2011, "Blocking Property of the Government of Syria and Prohibiting Certain Transactions With Respect to Syria," the release said. "This settlement amount reflects OFAC's determination that NCB's apparent violations were non-egregious."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Biden Says Launching Digital Strategy Unit to Communicate 'Honestly' With Americans

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) - US President-elect Joe Biden announced on Monday that his transition team has launched a 12-member digital strategy unit to communicate "transparently and honestly" with the American people on issues of growing importance such as the novel coronavirus pandemic.

"Communicating transparently and honestly with the American people is one of the most important responsibilities of a President," Biden said in a statement as he unveiled his White House Office of Digital Strategy. "This team of diverse experts has a wide range of experience in digital strategy and will help connect the White House to the American people in new and innovative ways."

The digital strategy unit is led by Platform Manager Brendan Cohen, Digital Strategy Director Rob Flaherty and Deputy Directors Rebecca Rinkevich and Christian Tom. Other members cover additional positions, including in the roles of digital partnerships manager, platforms director, content director and digital engagement director.

Vice President-elect Kamala Harris said in the statement that digital communities and online spaces have taken on even more importance in the wake of the novel coronavirus pandemic.

"We're building a team to speak to the lived experiences of all Americans. With much of our lives online, it is critical for this administration's digital efforts to be inclusive and extensive," Harris said.

The US authorities have reported that more than 19 million people have tested positive for the novel coronavirus since January and more than 330,000 have died.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Biden to Invoke Defense Production Act to Boost COVID Vaccine Output - Adviser

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) - US President-Elect Joe Biden will invoke the Defense Production Act after he takes office in January to ensure enough availability of vaccines for the COVID-19, a senior doctor on his team said in an interview on Monday.

"You will see him invoking the Defense Production Act," Celine Gounder, a viral diseases expert on Biden's COVID-19 advisory board, told CNBC's Squawk Box program. "The idea there is to make sure the personal protective equipment, the test capacity and the raw materials for the vaccines are produced in adequate supply."

The wartime production law, which allows the president to compel companies to prioritize manufacturing for national security, could help the US secure components and specialized products that manufacturers need to produce the vaccines.

The United States has been the country hardest hit by the COVID-19 since its global outbreak this year, with more than 19 million positive cases logged since January and nearly 330,000 deaths related to the virus. After a respite in the summer to early fall period, infections have started surging again, pushing hospitalization up to daily record highs of above 100,000 in recent weeks.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Novavax Starts Phase 3 Trial of COVID-19 Vaccine in US, Mexico - Company Statement

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) – US biotechnology company Novavax announced on Monday that it will start a Phase 3 trial of a possible COVID-19 vaccine in the United States and Mexico.

"Novavax, Inc. ... today announced initiation of PREVENT-19, its pivotal Phase 3 study in the United States and Mexico to evaluate the efficacy, safety and immunogenicity of NVX-CoV2373, the company's COVID-19 vaccine candidate," the company said in a news release.

Almost 30,000 volunteers in more than 100 cities in both countries will enroll the trial, and two-thirds of the participants will receive an active vaccine, it added.

Two initial phases of the trial demonstrated that the vaccine produces a robust immune response, generating a good amount of antibodies against the virus, the company noted.

"With the COVID-19 pandemic raging around the globe, this trial is a critical step in building the global portfolio of safe and effective vaccines to protect the world's population," Novavax president and chief executive officer Stanley Erck said.

Novavax is currently conducting different phases of scientific trials in such countries as the United Kingdom, South Africa, Australia.

The company said it plans to enroll people from different groups, including those intended to be in the 65 years of age or older, African Americans, Latin Americans and American Indians. Novavax is the fifth company to launch a Phase 3 trial of a coronavirus vaccine in the US, following similar moves by Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, AstraZenca and Johnson & Johnson.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Airports Screen Record Number of Travelers Over Holiday Despite COVID-19 Warnings - TSA

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) - US airports screened a record number of passengers over the Christmas holiday weekend despite warnings from top health officials about the risk of traveling amid a surge in COVID-19 cases, Transportation Security Administration (TSA) spokesperson Lisa Farbstein said on Monday.

"TSA screened 1,284,599 people at airport checkpoints nationwide yesterday, Sunday, Dec. 27," Farbstein said via Twitter. "It is the highest checkpoint throughput since the pandemic hit. It is also the 6th day in the last 10 that volume has surpassed 1M. If you choose to travel, please wear a mask."

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) had previously urged Americans not to travel during the Christmas holiday, warning of an "exponential" increase in COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths across the country.

Health officials in the United States have documented more than 19.1 million cases of COVID-19 since January, data compiled by Johns Hopkins University (JHU) showed on Monday. More than 333,140 people have died of the disease in the country since the start of the pandemic.